



U.S. Interests Section Newsletter

Information for American Citizens in Cuba

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WELCOME MESSAGE FROM U.S. INTERESTS SECTION CHIEF OF MISSION JONATHAN D. FARRAR AND HIS WIFE, TERRY FARRAR



After much anticipation on our part, we are very pleased to have arrived in Cuba, and find that each day brings new experiences. Life in Cuba is certainly never dull, and often full of charm. We look forward to meeting many of you at several upcoming events during the month of November. First of all will be election night on November 4, where we will have live coverage in English and Spanish of the evening's events. It should be an exciting night. Later in the month, we will host a meeting with all of our volunteer wardens (thank you for your service!) from across the island. Our final event will be the Marine Corps Ball. If you do not make it to any of those, we look forward to seeing you during our meanderings around Havana.

The United States Interests Section is here to serve you. In the coming months, you can look forward to sweeping changes to our website, and new initiatives to reduce the waiting period for non-immigrant visa interviews. I would welcome your feedback and ideas on how we can serve you better. You can reach me always at farrarjd2@state.gov. We look forward to hearing from you.

Jonathan and Terry Farrar

USINT TO HOST ELECTION NIGHT FESTIVITIES AT THE CHIEF OF MISSION'S RESIDENCE

On the evening of November 4, 2008, Chief of Mission Jonathan Farrar and his wife, Terry, will host an election night party at their residence in Cubanacán. A limited number of invitations will be available to American Citizens residing in Cuba that will be distributed on a first come, first serve basis. If you are interested please call the American Citizen Services Unit (ACS) at (53)(7) 833-3551 to 59 on or before October 31, 2008.



In this Issue ...

Final Reminder to Vote	pg. 2
Expedited Appointment System for NIVs	pg. 2
Second Annual Warden's Meeting	pg. 3
ACS Services.....	pg. 3
Sign up for the Foreign Service Written Exam	pg. 3
Passport Card Information.....	pg. 4
Launch of new Student Website.....	pg. 4

FINAL REMINDER TO VOTE!

American citizens should vote now in the November 4, 2008 presidential and general elections. If you registered to vote and requested an absentee ballot by your state's deadline, you should have already received your state absentee ballot. Please return your marked ballot now.

Ballot hasn't arrived? If your ballot has not arrived, use the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot. The FWAB serves as an emergency ballot for voters who registered in time but fail to receive an official ballot from local election officials. It is available at www.fvap.gov or the U.S. Interests Section. If your regular state ballot arrives after you have mailed the FWAB, complete and mail the state ballot as well.

Returning your ballot: Voted ballots and FWABs may be mailed to your local voting officials in the United States through first-class international mail or from any U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Last-minute voters should consider using an express courier company to deliver their ballots. A few states also accept completed ballots by fax or e-mail.

Questions?: The **Voting Assistance Officer** at USINT is available to answer questions about absentee voting. To contact the Voting Assistance Officer, call (53)(7) 833-3551, ext ACS or send an e-mail to D'AlesandroGX@state.gov.



On August 15, 2008, Chief of Mission Jonathan Farrar and Vice Consul Timothy Peltier visited an American citizen and two Dominican nuns in Matanzas City. The Servants of Maria, Ministry of the Sick are active in charity work across the Island and include 8 American citizens working to help the sick and needy of Cuba.

EXPEDITED APPOINTMENT SERVICE FOR NONIMMIGRANT VISAS

The U.S. Interests Section is pleased to announce that there will be a limited number of interview appointments for applicants who have scheduled their interview appointment through our Call Center and whose appointments are scheduled six months from today's date. These appointments are only available to applicants who complete the DS-156 form online and send it to us as a PDF attachment via email. **This service is not open to applicants who have been refused a nonimmigrant visa within the last six months.**

What is the "Electronic Visa Application Form" (EVAF)?

The Electronic Visa Application Form (EVAF) is the new electronic version of the non-immigrant visa form DS-156 available at our website. The applicant completes the form at the EVAF website, which is <https://evisaforms.state.gov/ds156.asp?lang=>. This website creates a barcode that contains all the application data. Applicants must print out all three pages of the form and bring them to the visa interview.

If the applicant meets the requirements and the application is completed correctly, the U.S. Interests Section will notify the applicant/relative of the new interview date as long as new appointments are available.

Cuban Family Reunification Program

Cuban nationals who reside in Cuba and who are beneficiaries of a properly filed I-130 petition that has been approved, but for which an immigrant visa is not yet immediately available, are eligible for parole into the United States. For more info visit www.uscis.gov or call 1-800-375-5283.

The American Citizen Services Unit is Here to Help!!!



Here is a list of some of the emergency services we provide:

Lost or Stolen Passports: If you lose your passport, ACS can help you obtain a replacement. In case of theft, you should immediately report the incident to Cuban police and obtain a copy of the police report.

Medical Assistance: If you are sick or injured, ACS can assist you in finding medical care and can contact family or a friend at your request.

Emergency Funds: If your money has been lost or stolen, ACS can help you contact your family or friends and arrange for them to transfer funds to you.

Arrests: Americans in Cuba are subject to Cuban law. In the unfortunate event that an American is arrested, the United States government cannot get the citizen out of jail. ACS can provide a list of local attorneys and legal resources, visit the arrestee to monitor treatment, and act as a liaison between family and friends in the U.S. ACS can also assist families in transferring money, food, and clothing to those being held in Cuban jails or prisons.

Death abroad: In the unfortunate event of a death in Cuba, we can work with family in the U.S to arrange for the transfer of remains from Cuba.

Disasters: ACS can contact your relatives to let them know that you are safe in the case of a natural disaster.

Emergency situation: It is a good idea if you give your family in the U.S the following number at the State Department to call in an emergency situation: (202) 647-5225.

USINT TO HOST SECOND ANNUAL MEETING OF U.S. CITIZEN WARDENS IN CUBA

On November 21, 2008, the American Citizen Services Unit (ACS) will host the Second Annual Warden's Meeting at the Residence of the Chief Mission (COM) in Havana City. The Warden system is the mechanism that has been established by the U.S. Department of State to disseminate information to United States Citizens living overseas during times of emergency. It is a valuable tool that allows embassies to reach out to Americans in a timely, efficient, and effective manner. USINT speakers will cover a wide variety of topics including hurricane preparedness, personal security, health issues in the tropics, and improvements to the warden system. Last year's meeting was a marked success with more than 30 wardens from 10 Cuban provinces in attendance. The ACS Unit looks forward to another successful wardens meeting this year and continued cooperation with the wardens. If you are interested in being a warden, please let us know. As always, we welcome your input as we continue to improve the warden system.



Photo from the 1st Annual Warden's Meeting on November 23, 2007.

FOREIGN SERVICE WRITTEN EXAM TO BE OFFERED AT U.S. INTERESTS SECTION ON NOVEMBER 8, 2008

Have you ever thought that you might like to work in a U.S. Embassy abroad? One way to do so is to become a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Department of State. The first step is taking the Foreign Service Written Exam. The exam will be offered at the U.S. Interests Section on Saturday November 8, 2008. For more information or to register for the exam, please go to www.careers.state.gov.



The State Department is pleased to announce the launch of a new website www.studentsabroad.state.gov, geared specifically to students traveling abroad. This site is a one-stop source for information about getting passports and travel documents, staying healthy overseas, signing up as an absentee voter, and registering with the U.S. Embassy in case you need help while traveling overseas. Why not take a look at the website right now, and share the link with the students in your family?



PASSPORT CARD RULE IMPLEMENTATION



The Department of State started issuing passport cards in July of 2008 in response to the needs of border resident communities for a less expensive and more portable alternative to the traditional passport book. It is part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) which will become effective in June 2009. However, one need not live along the border to apply. The card will have the same period of validity as the passport book: ten years for an adult, and five for children 15 and younger. The passport application fee is \$20 for adults and \$10 for minors.

The passport card will facilitate entry and expedite document processing at land and sea ports of entry when arriving from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda.

The card may not/not be used to travel by air. The passport card is by definition a passport and will be considered proof of U.S. citizenship. It will otherwise carry the rights and privileges of the U.S. passport book, and will be adjudicated to the exact same standards. Further information about applying for a U.S. passport card will be available on travel.state.gov.

Contact Information: American Citizen Services, Consular Section,
U.S. Interests Section, Havana, Cuba
Address: Calzada e/ L y M. Vedad, Ciudad Habana
Telephone: (53)(7) 8333551 to 59, Fax (57)(3) 833-1653
Website: <http://havana.usinterestsection.gov/>
Walk-in Hours: Mon.-Thu. 8:00-4:30pm, Fri. 8:00-3:30 pm.
Closed U.S. & Cuban Holidays